

# The Circuit Writer



NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

Northern New Jersey Conference, The United Methodist Church

Spring 1980 - Number 15

## RIDING THE HACKETTSTOWN CIRCUIT IN 1855:

### SELECTIONS FROM THE DIARY OF THE REV. JACOB P. FORT

by Dr. Henry Lyle Lambdin

At the Christmas Service, December 23, 1979, of the Livingston United Methodist Church, of which the Rev. Thomas T. Trainor is pastor, the Lay Leader Emeritus, Richard Faulks, presented to Dr. Kenneth Rowe, Methodist Librarian and Historian at Drew, the 1855 and 1880 diaries of an uncle, the Rev. Jacob P. Fort, who was then pastor at Hackettstown.

Jacob Fort, 1818-1893, was a brother of John P. Fort, a governor of New Jersey. Jacob worked as a mechanic from 1818 to 1834 at which time he was converted under the ministry of Henry Boehm who had been Bishop Asbury's traveling companion from 1808 to 1813. He was admitted on trial in the class of 1844 of the New Jersey Conference which also included E. H. Stokes and A.E. Ballard. The 1855 Diary presents some vivid details of what an itinerant's daily life was composed of 125 years ago, as witness the following entries:

Monday, January 1 - "A new year! and a beautiful day. At the early hour of 5 a.m., I married Wm. M. DeHart of Michigan to Elizabeth Pool."

Tuesday, January 2 - "Out with waggon for the first for more than four weeks."

January 3 - "Put down my hams. 6 qts. of salt; 3 ozs. saleratus; 2 ozs. salt-peter; 1 pt. molasses."

January 5 - "Paid to Bro. John Scott the sum of \$12 for 202 lbs. of beef. The choir met at my house."

January 6 - "A.M. Called upon J.S. Hazen's family and prayed with them. 7 P.M. Married Ed. E. Protzman to Mary Tims.

January 7 was Sunday. Fort preached "at the stone school house at 10:30 a.m." He noted that "It is difficult to drive a waggon through the snow drifts," nevertheless he made it to Warrenville for the 3 p.m. service. In the evening all of the family "but me, out to hear Bro. W. I am suffering from a stye on the right eye." Next day, Monday, "Bishop Janes and J. K. Shaw made their appearance at my house. They are returning from the dedication of Belvidere church; left after dinner on 2 p.m. train. It is wash day with us. Mrs. F. has been very busy." With a hungry bishop and presiding elder to prepare dinner for, and the family wash to be done and hung on the line mid the January breezes, "very busy" may have impressed Mrs. Fort as an understatement. On Friday following, after taking the family to Bro. A. H. Clark's, Jacob proceeded to White Hall for horse feed... On Sunday, "The day clear and cold, preached at Danville three times." On Saturday, January 13, this apparently reproachful entry appears: "Made no advancement in study today."

Monday, January 15, was the beginning of an eventful week. The old Vienna church had been sold. The new church building cost \$2,060, but the new bell cost \$375, and the furniture and other extras added over \$500 more. On Tuesday, bright and early a Brother Steele was at Fort's home. "We talked over the affairs of the church. His mind has become much soured with many of the brethren." Next day, Wednesday, "6:30 p.m. Presiding Elders J. L. Lenhart and J. M. Tuttle made their appearance." On Thursday morning at 10:30 "Rev. J. L. Lenhart preached and dedicated the Vienna church." Tuttle preached in the afternoon and Lenhart again in the

evening. \$469 was collected during the day. On Friday "The preachers all returned to their homes." But that evening Fort began services as "an extra effort for the salvation of sinners and the salvation of the church." His first sermon in the new Vienna church building was on the text, "Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee." Neighboring ministers assisted with the revival services. The weather was extremely unfavorable for travel. Fort observed that when Bro. W. preached on the text, "Thus saith the Lord, 'As I live, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked,' it was a good discourse but a little too boisterous in its delivery. This sometimes is hard to avoid."

The services at Vienna continued. Fort and Brother Wiggins visited throughout the region. January 31 "There were 16 at the altar." It had indeed been an eventful month for Rev. Jacob Fort, starting with a 5 a.m. wedding on New Year's Day and ending with the altar of the new Vienna church crowded with penitents in search of peace. Between the opening and the ending of the month, Fort had "put down his hams" for the months to come, bought quarters of beef for the remaining weeks of winter, manoeuvred his "waggon" through snowdrifts to outlying preaching places, supervised the sale of the old church building at Vienna and arranged for the dedication of the new church, entertained a bishop and two presiding elders, officiated at weddings and funerals, begun "a general class" for converts and kept up the church records so as to be ready for the Quarterly Conferences and the Annual Conference.

All the while he had reminded men and women that "they were subject to a demand that they did not create and that they could not satisfy," but also that there is an Advocate and Intercessor who meets God's demand and is our peace.

Jacob Fort had a sense of history. He had been converted under the ministry of Henry Boehm who was born in 1775 and who always referred to himself as being "one year older than my country." Boehm's five years as Bishop Asbury's traveling companion was not lost on the young mechanic from Pemberton, New Jersey. Fort's Diary for January of 1855 impresses us with his sense of identity and of clear-cut purpose as he traveled the wintry, windswept countryside of the Hackettstown Circuit.

The discovery - or the recovery - of identity comes by way of the study of history. True for the citizen of a country, the member of a church, the graduate of an institution, or the Methodist minister who belongs to an Annual Conference. We need to discover more Diaries like that of Jacob Fort. There must be hundreds of such treasures that were handed down to children who have failed to appreciate their unique value. Would that our Conference Historical Societies had the "charisma" to call them forth and make their contents known!

#### UNITED METHODIST ARCHIVES AND RESEARCH TO BE BUILT AT DREW

Ground-breaking has been set for October 19, 1980 for a 2 million dollar United Methodist Archives and Research Center at Drew University. The new building will house the historical library, archives and museum of the General Commission on Archives and History of our church, now in North Carolina, along with the considerable Methodist and Wesley collections of the Drew University Library. "The combination of their collections plus ours under one roof will create at Drew one of the most comprehensive Methodist research collections anywhere in the world," says Dr. Kenneth Rowe, Drew University's Methodist Librarian and Historian. The building, scheduled to open in early 1982, will be located to the southeast of Rose Memorial Library and connected to a major addition to that building by an underground passage. The vision of a new building so close in the future is one which excites Rowe and his colleagues who have grown used to living with the daily worry of a valued collection deteriorating without proper climate control and adequate storage space. The heart of the building is a two-story underground vault with sophisticated environmental and security controls. Offices, reading rooms and a large museum area will be located on the ground floor. The top floor will contain stacks for the library collections of the joint research facility.

RETIRED AND RETIRING PASTORS

Have you made your tape of reminiscences and one of your very best sermons for the Conference archives? If not, contact Paul Spiecker, Clifton, for details. Phone: 684-4816

LOCAL CHURCH HISTORY CONTEST - Awards to be presented during 1980 Conference

Several local churches have submitted histories of their churches published during the calendar year 1979 for our seventh annual LOCAL CHURCH HISTORY RECOGNITION CONTEST. Two awards will be presented during the June 1980 meeting of the annual conference.

If your church plans to publish a history of your local church in 1980, we urge you to enter it in next year's contest now. Large or small, pamphlet or cloth bound, mimeographed or printed--all histories printed during 1980 are eligible. Each history will become part of the Conference's permanent collection.

MAIL ONE COPY TO: Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, Drew University Library, Madison, N.J. 07940 by February 1, 1981.

TRAVELING EXHIBIT ON BISHOP FRANCIS ASBURY

A small exhibit of Asbury memorabilia from the collection of Drew University is available on request for use at special celebrations in local churches. The exhibit includes several mounted prints and photographs, a set of ordination certificates signed by our first Bishop, along with a pair of spectacles he wore. When used with historical items from a local congregation, this makes an attractive addition to an anniversary or other historical observation. Contact Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, Drew University Library, Madison, N.J. 07940. Telephone: 377-3000, Ext. 470.

CELEBRATING THE HERITAGE

LYNDHURST: An anniversary service in remembrance of the 65 years of worship in the present sanctuary was held December 9, 1979. The Lyndhurst congregation honored Louise Muir and William N. Messing, Sr. as current members who were present at the dedication service 65 years ago.

NUTLEY: "Ten Men and a Barn" is the intriguing title of a new book exploring the roots of Vincent Church in Nutley. The handsome volume was introduced to the congregation during worship services on December 16 by Dr. Frank S. Mead who co-authored the history with J. C. Brown. Copies are available from the church office at \$5.00 each.

PARSIPPANY: The church plans a number of special events to be held throughout the year to celebrate the congregation's 150th birthday.

PORT JERVIS: This congregation last fall celebrated the 200th anniversary birthday of the Sunday School, with a special worship service. Former teachers and students were recognized during the service. A history of the local Sunday School was prepared and read. Following the service there was a birthday party and social hour. Leading the preparations for this special event was Isabel Twichell, chairwoman for the Work Area on Education.

RUTHERFORD: Rutherford Methodists celebrated the centennial of the founding of their congregation on Sunday May 18. Pastor Richard A. Wittig led the congregation in a service of renewal of Baptismal vows and Dr. Rowe of Drew University preached the anniversary sermon.

SOMERVILLE: The Methodists of Somerville celebrated 150 years of service on Sunday, April 27. Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe of Drew University preached the anniversary sermon. A reception and display of historical items from the Drew collection followed.

UNION VILLAGE: A four-part series during the Sunday Seminar in February focused on our United Methodist Heritage. Professors Russell Richey and Kenneth Rowe of Drew University led the sessions.

DO YOU NEED A SPEAKER ON METHODISM?

Is your church having an anniversary soon? Are you planning to celebrate the centennial of the Sunday School (1980) or looking forward to the bicentennial of American Methodism in 1984? Or are you just plain interested in knowing more about Methodist history?

If so, here is a list of resource persons from Drew University. All may be reached through the Drew University number--377-3000. Individual extension numbers are listed below:

Dr. Donald G. Jones, Associate Professor of Religion, Extension 388

Dr. James E. Kirby, Dean of the Theological School, Extension 258

Dr. Theodore C. Linn, Associate Professor of Religion; Dean of Student Life, Extension 390

Dr. Thomas C. Oden, Professor of Theology and Ethics, Extension 266

Dr. James H. Pain, Pfeiffer Professor of Religion, Extension 389

Dr. Russell E. Richey, Associate Professor of Church History, Assistant to the President, Extension 203

Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, Methodist Librarian and Associate Professor of History, Extension 470

Mr. Donald M. Vorp, Theological Librarian, Instructor, Extension 472.